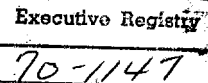


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5 March 1970

## MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Laos Questions

Set forth below are a number of questions that are likely to be asked by the press, the Congress or the public at large after any official statement along the lines of the 4 March draft Presidential Statement on Laos. Where we felt competent to do so, we have suggested possible answers to some of these questions. In the case of questions that cover subjects on which we have some, but not all, of the relevant facts, we have appended comments outlining those pertinent details known to us. In other cases, the answers will clearly have to be drafted and decided at the White House.

Question 1: The President said the North Vietnamese left large numbers of North Vietnamese troops in Laos at the time of the Geneva Accords in 1962 and that this number has steadily increased since then. He mentioned 33,000 in mid-1967, 46,000 in mid-1968, 55,000 in mid-1969, and 67,000 today. Are these figures based on evidence, if so what?

Suggested Answer: These figures are based on a careful analysis of all information available to the US Government, some of it deriving from very sensitive sources and methods. A detailed explanation of sources would deny us future information, hence I cannot catalogue our evidence in detail. These figures, particularly the current ones, are amply supported.

Question 2: The President made frequent reference to North Vietnamese aggression and violations of the Geneva Accords but gave no specifics. What was he talking about?

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Suggested Answer: The Accords violations started at the time the Accords were signed. We withdrew [ ] our military personnel then in Laos. Of the approximately 6,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos at that time, only 40 were withdrawn. The remainder stayed and their number, as the President mentioned, has increased more than tenfold in the eight years since the Accords were signed. Using the North Vietnamese Army, Hanoi has detached large segments of Laotian territory from the control of the Lao Government by simple military conquest. The pattern of North Vietnamese activity has been amply and publicly demonstrated by over 100 North Vietnamese Army prisoners captured by the Lao Government who have told their stories and the record of their own unit's activities to the press. The Lao Government has published White Papers documenting and protesting North Vietnamese aggression in 1966, 1968, and 1969. We believe the proof of Hanoi's actions is overwhelming and indisputable.

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Question 3: Could it not be argued that Hanoi's actions have simply been responses to US escalation made necessary by the Hanoi Government's natural desire to protect its own territory?

Suggested Answer: Not very plausibly. The support we have given the Royal Lao Government and the actions we have taken to inhibit the movement of North Vietnamese men and supplies through Laos to the South Vietnam battlefields have all come after, not before, Hanoi's actions. The less than three million Laotians constitute no threat whatsoever to North Vietnam with its population of 20 million people. As the President has said, there are not and never have been US ground combat forces in Laos. The threat to Hanoi argument, therefore, simply will not wash.

Question 4: Even if what the President says is true, are we not just as guilty as Hanoi in violating the Geneva Accords, hence in a poor position to criticize the North Vietnamese for the things we ourselves are also doing or have done to escalate the war?

Suggested Answer: No. There are differences of scale and time sequence here involved that make insupportable the argument that both the North Vietnamese and the US Government are equally guilty. The 1962 agreements that Governor Harriman negotiated at President Kennedy's direction were ones that President Kennedy, President Johnson and President Nixon have always been anxious to see fulfilled, to the letter. If this were a perfect world, we might have stood aside and registered nothing but verbal protest at the persistent pattern of Hanoi's systematic violation of these Accords, a pattern of action which has clearly demonstrated

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that Hanoi never had the slightest intention of abiding by these 1962 agreements. You simply cannot equate 600-odd officials and advisors, most of whom are performing perfectly normal diplomatic or economic assistance functions, with 67,000 line troops. Furthermore, the Geneva Accords clearly and explicitly give the Lao Government the right to take appropriate measures in its own defense and to call for conventional military assistance in this sphere.

Question 5: The President says there are only 619 US Government personnel of all types in Laos. What about widespread statements in the press and in Congress to the effect that we have several thousand military personnel there in a wide variety of combat and combat support roles?

Suggested Answer: The President has given you the facts. The other stories of which you speak are based on rumors, inaccuracies, and wild exaggerations, including Communist propaganda, none of which are true.

Question 6: Does the President's 619 figure include CIA agents in Laos?

Suggested Answer: As the President stated, it includes the total number of US Government employees in Laos from all agencies.

Question 7: How many CIA agents are included in that 619 total?

Suggested Answer: That is a question which, for obvious reasons, I am simply not going to answer.

Question 8: What does the CIA do in Laos?

Suggested Answer: For equally obvious reasons, I am not going to answer that question. In Laos, as elsewhere, under the direction of the Ambassador, the CIA performs activities and functions approved or directed by the President and the National Security Council.

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Question 9: How about General Vang Pao and his Meo guerrillas? Is this not CIA's secret army?

Suggested Answer: General Vang Pao is a General officer in the Royal Lao Army and the Commander of the government's Military Region II. Most of his troops are ethnically Meo tribesmen, as is he. They are as much Lao Government forces, however, as any other component of the Royal Lao Army. The United States Government has provided some logistic support and advisory assistance to Lao forces in Military Region II as it has in the other four of the Kingdom of Laos' five military regions. It is entirely inaccurate to describe the forces of Military Region II as a "secret army."

Question 10: What about [ ] Long Chen which has been visited by American newspapermen recently?

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Suggested Answer: I am always suspicious of stories by reporters who cannot even accurately spell the name of the place they visited. Long Tieng is the site of General Vang Pao's tactical headquarters in Military Region II. It is not a "secret base" in the sense that recent press stories have alleged. Armies in wartime seldom encourage unauthorized visitors at tactical headquarters engaged in directing combat operations. All armies are reluctant to have journalists publish information that enemy intelligence services are very anxious to acquire.

Question 11: What about Air America and Continental Air Lines? Are these not the CIA's secret Air Force?

Suggested Answer: No they are not. Air America is a public company primarily engaged in charter services overseas. It has contracts with the U.S. Mission in Vietnam and in Laos. Continental Air Services International is a wholly owned subsidiary of one of our major domestic carriers. It also provides services under charter to the U.S. Mission in Laos. Laos is a country of exceptional primitive communications and generally non-existent roads. Economic aid such as rice etc. and other forms of material support to the Lao Government simply have to be moved by air. Hence the legitimate need which these private companies fulfill. Their aircraft are civil aircraft and none of them are armed.

Question 12: Who flies these planes? How many pilots are there? Are these pilots included in the President's 619 total?

Suggested Answer: These planes are flown by civilian employees of the two companies in question, most of them Americans and all of them subject to normal FAA licensing and certification regulations. They are <sup>not</sup> employees of the United States Government and hence are not included in the President's total. I do not know the precise number. It varies over time but is determined by the companies in question in line with normal business practices.

Question 13: The President says no Americans have been killed in Laos in ground combat. What about pilots?

Comment: This answer should be provided by the Department of Defense. According to our records, from 1962 through 14 February 1970, 132 U.S. military personnel have been killed in air operations over Laos.

Question 14: How many other Americans have been killed in Laos?

Comment: Again, we do not have the complete information necessary for this answer.

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Question 15: Who flies the planes of "the Royal Lao Air Force"? Are  South Vietnamese pilots used? Any Americans, civilian or military?

This is a question whose answer will have to be developed at the White House. To our knowledge there are no South Vietnamese pilots used

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Question 16: The President has said there are no American combat troops in Laos. What about MACV operations launched into Laos from South Vietnam?

Comment: This answer should be developed by the Department of Defense and the White House. From time to time in the past stories about PRAIRIE FIRE have come out of Saigon and some correspondents may be aware of this program's existence.

Question 17: Even if there have never been Americans, are there or have there ever been other non-Lao combat troops fighting in Laos,

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Comment: The answer here should also be developed by the White House and DOD. Communist propaganda has from time to time complained about

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Question 18: How much have we bombed in Laos?

Question 19: Are we using B-52s in Laos?

Question 20: Have we used B-52s in support of Lao Army operations?

Question 21: Has our bombing of Laos increased since the bombing of North Vietnam ended?

Comment: The answers to the above questions should be drafted in the White House.

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Question 21: Have we ever conducted defoliation operations in Laos?

Comment: So far as we are aware, the answer to this question is defensively "no."

Question 22: The President has indicated that we are bombing Laos to curtail North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam. Secretary Rogers and others have recently said that infiltration from North Vietnam has been reduced; yet the bombing of Laos seems to be steadily expanding. How do you reconcile these contrary statements?

Comment: This is a question almost certain to be asked in some form but one whose answer will have to be drafted at the White House.

Question 23: The President insists there are no US ground combat troops in Laos but does acknowledge the presence of 228 military personnel. What do these people do? How many of them are ex-Green Berets?

Comment: The answer here should emphasize the strictly advisory, training and logistic support role of the service attache offices in Laos. The "Green Beret" question has been much discussed in the press and Congress, hence is certain to be raised. So far as we are aware, no special effort has been made to assign, detail or hire Special Forces personnel for Laos. Our records indicate that approximately [ ] people in Laos have served in the Special Forces at some time in their previous careers. We have no data for any of the attache office components.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

Executive Register

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Attached per your request  
are a list of questions that may  
be stimulated by the proposed  
Presidential statement.

/s/ Richard Helms  
Richard Helms

5 March 1970  
(DATE)

Attachment

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FORM NO.  
1 AUG 54

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REPLACES FORM 10-101  
WHICH MAY BE USED.

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